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AN APOLOGY FOR LIBERTY

A LECTURE DELIVERED FOR THE BRITISH
CONSTITUTION ASSOCIATION

BY THOMAS MACKAY

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AN APOLOGY FOR LIBERTY

A LECTURE DELIVERED FOR THE BRITISH CONSTITUTION ASSOCIATION

IN what sense do I suggest that an Apology for Liberty is necessary? I will explain. Under the political constitution from which this association takes its name we enjoy a certain measure of liberty.

The world is full of inequalities and misery, and any principle which exercises authority there, whether that authority is limited or unlimited, needs an apology.

The panaceas proposed by the Socialists appear to us unworkable, and under the auspices of this association much destructive, and, as we believe, successful, criticism has been directed against them. But something more is wanted. We are frequently told that we who refuse to succumb to the glamour of Socialism are content with a policy of mere negation, that we have no constructive principle to put forward—that, in fact, the principle of liberty is a barren principle, and that there is nothing in it to kindle the enthusiasm which all great causes require.

Such a criticism requires an answer. I am painfully conscious of my inability to deal adequately with so large a theme; all I can do is to direct atten-

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tion to one or two points which appear to be of the first importance. A complete exposition of the subject would require the labour of many minds and the study of a lifetime ; for I conceive that—

First, the apologia which we require must begin with a long historical statement, showing the influence which liberty has exercised on the development of human civilization.

Secondly, our apologia must examine the vast series of actions which at the present time get themselves performed automatically by individual initiative, under the protection of the principle of liberty.

Thirdly, as to the future, we have to establish a great generalization, which would require men to subordinate their instinct, to coerce and to compel, and, by an express effort of reason, to adopt the opinion that by liberty, and not by force, human progress is advanced. On each of these points—the past, the present, and the future—I must endeavour to say something, however inadequate.

There are, however, two preliminary matters on which I must make a few remarks.

First, there is a misconception which I should like to combat ; it arises out of a misleading use of terms.

The main argument used by so-called Individualists, from Herbert Spencer downwards, is that man is a social animal ; he cannot be studied solely as an individual. He has naturally entered into co-operation with his fellows ; he has found it an economy of effort to abandon the attempt to satisfy his wants by plunder and oppression, and he has gradually betaken himself to the more equitable and more economical system of the division of labour and exchange.

This free intercourse of men in their social environment has given rise to an appropriate social

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sentiment, which exercises an accepted authority, and does not require the sanction of legislation and the State.

We who profess the faith of liberty believe in the efficacy, the equity, and the necessity of this natural society. There seems, therefore, little point in giving to us the nickname of Individualists, which, for my part, I am inclined to repudiate. If we chose to assert it, we have as good a right as anyone to call ourselves Socialists.

On the other hand, the main contention of the so-called Socialists is the denial of the sufficiency of society, and an urgent demand that it shall be controlled and overborne by the State—a source of authority always fortuitous and generally partisan and corrupt. The French, who are a logical people, sometimes call their Socialists *éstatistes*, and we shall do well to remember that there is this anti-social element in the so-called Socialist creed, and that the party of liberty not only does not ignore the social co-operation which the civilized man has everywhere adopted, but regards it as a thing essential to his theory of life.

The second point I approach with much misgiving, for I would fain avoid perplexing myself and my audience by raising the bewildering question of free-will and determinism ; but if we are led, as I was a few minutes ago, to suggest that a certain line of development is inevitable, of necessity—and I believe this is essential to a right understanding of the subject—it is obvious that if we would deal sincerely with the matter, this problem cannot be shirked.

Free-will does not, of course, mean that in respect of human action and motives the laws of causality, which science has taught us to look for everywhere, are suspended. Relatively to the vast chain of events, of which we ourselves and our

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characters are a part, and which we vaguely call the Cosmic Process, free-will, conceived of as an undetermined originating cause, is, of course, an illusion. We are the men which our antecedents have made us, and we cannot contract ourselves out of this. Nevertheless, there is in this illusion (which, however, is a very real phase of consciousness, however we explain it) something which makes it the source of our happiness and contentment. If we analyze the joy and dignity of life, these things will be found to consist largely in the idea that our activities are governed by motives which we find within our own consciousness, and which we like to regard as self-controlled—in fact, that we are masters of our own destiny.

Now, there is an analogy in our daily experience which seems to me suggestive. We are daily under the optical illusion that the sun travels from east to west and that our planet remains stationary, but we know that this is not the case. So it appears to me that it is our will that moves towards acquiescence with the inevitable course of events, and that it is not events which move in accordance with our will.

If we review the course of history, amid much which is transient there remains a definite, permanent growth, not only in the physical world, but in the sphere of ethical and social sentiment, and, in evolutionary parlance, that which is permanent and that which is destined to be permanent is identical with what is good, and constitutes the chain of events towards which our wills must move in acquiescence.

We mentally, therefore, impute to Providence, to the Cosmic Process, or whatever we like to call it, a beneficent purpose. By considerations of religion and morality, and even by our appreciation of economic expediency, the faculty which we call

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our will is disciplined to accept the permanently inevitable, and there is no satisfaction to the human spirit outside the line of action which we thus seem to choose for ourselves.

There are, of course, periods of reaction, when men seem to be taking delight in forces which are the negation of liberty. Such reactions may be explained as reverisons to a type that was once temporarily necessary, or as survivals from ancient chaos ; but viewed as incidents in the great stream of tendency, such reactions are only temporary. The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small. Whatever be the source of the strength of such reaction, one thing stands out clearly. In respect of those lines of conduct which are not destined to become permanent, there is a corrective and retributive influence at work, which reflects itself in the human spirit, and causes a restlessness in, and dissatisfaction with, conduct which is not of the true type. This feeling of unrest ranges from the mere feeling of physical discomfort following on excess to the poignant remorse of a good man who has momentarily been betrayed into conduct which he deems unworthy of his character. There is the counterpart also of the approving conscience, ranging from the complacency following some elementary act of self-control up to the triumphant ecstasy of martyrdom. Such a faculty of approval and disapproval may not be, in the ordinary sense of the term, a manifestation of free-will originating causes of action, but it combines to focus our sense of the joy and dignity of life on those permanent lines of development which we identify with progress. ‘ Die Weltgeschichte ist nichts als die entwickelung des Begriffes der Freiheit ’ (The world’s history is nothing but the evolution of the conception of freedom), says Hegel, in one of those happily-

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inspired phrases, which, rightly understood, seem to illuminate the hidden purpose of life.

If For man to imagine that in all this he is a free agent in the ordinary sense of the term may be an illusion. Ultimately man's liberty consists in his conscious submission to the ordained discipline of the ages. Therefore, this revelation of destiny is a true one, it affords a rational basis for cheerfulness, for gratitude in good-fortune and courage in adversity. It involves no dull and sullen fatalism. It puts us under an obligation, which Nature does not allow us to disregard, to proclaim our faith, to ask our neighbours to share our enthusiasm in the belief that freedom and the beneficent purpose that runs through the ages are one and the same, and that this will not fail of its fulfilment.

We are a long way from winning any general acceptance of such a view. If, as time goes on, this interpretation gains ground, it will be assurance to us, not that our efforts have altered the inevitable, but that we are fortunate in living at a time when a large and more rapid consummation of our hopes is drawing near. Interpreted in this way, freedom is the pride and satisfaction that we feel in becoming conscious of the high destiny that is being fulfilled in our persons.

In any case—whether our hypothesis stands or not—it is surely obvious that the development and progress of the race must proceed through the only manifestations of consciousness that are known to us—the individual consciousness. The suggestion that a society or a State has a consciousness of its own is a mere metaphor, which Nature does not recognize, and the only forms of organization which the individual consciousness can bear with equanimity and contentment are those which seem to proceed from individual free choice.

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Every other form of regimentation in time becomes a burdensome accretion, which the spirit of free initiative seems eager to wear down and destroy. The domestication of the weak and foolish by the wise and the strong involves a state of slavery—more refined, perhaps, than earlier forms, but inconsistent with the ineradicable aspiration of the human spirit. On these grounds, therefore, we are warranted in suggesting that the scheme of the Socialists, which they would hardly object to hear described as the rule of the more perfect imposed on the less perfect, is doomed to failure.

Let us leave these difficult, but, as I believe, very important, metaphysical speculations, and consider how far this view is borne out by the facts of history and life.

Our first appeal, then, is to history. I need hardly point out how largely history is occupied with the co-operation and association of man with his fellows, and for the purpose of the present inquiry, the question we have to ask is, How far has this co-operation proceeded from the discipline imposed or accepted by individual initiative; how far from regimentation imposed from without?

As a general proposition, it will hardly be denied that the further back we go, the smaller appears to be the part played by the self-government of the individual, the larger his dependence on the unsubdued forces of Nature, on custom, superstition, and authority. It has been well said the savage is the least free of men. The history of civilization is the history of man's disentanglement from the servitude of his primitive condition, and of his gradual endowment with the powers and accomplishments of the civilized life. It is not to be contested that the development of social arrange-

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ments has been, with only temporary reactions, a steady advance from servitude to freedom.

Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus. That which is accepted and desired, always, everywhere, and by all, represents surely a decisive verdict of history ; and of this character, I should make bold to say, was the yearning with which men and nations have striven for liberty in all its various manifestations. At the present day we have, temporarily perhaps, exhausted our interest in political liberty and in religious liberty ; but there was a time when the idea of political and religious liberty stirred aspiration in a way that we who have achieved these liberties can hardly appreciate. We have curbed the tyranny of kings and oligarchs and have established the tyranny of the majority, but the last word has not been said as to the limits of the power of the State..

Nor, again, though here we may not pause to pursue the subject far, would we be held indifferent to the more spiritual aspects of liberty. It is, I submit, the object of all true philosophy and personal religion to establish on impregnable bases the independence and freedom of the human spirit. The highest discipline of which the mind of man is capable results in the courage and faith in human destiny that rise superior to material conditions and fortune, that confront the inscrutable and inevitable mystery of death with cheerful fortitude, and invest with absorbing interest the spiritual element in man's nature. This is the highest aspect of our theme ; it must not be ignored, though on this occasion the special subject of our consideration is of a more prosaic nature.

The interest of the question, undoubtedly, has in these later days shifted to the economic aspects of the question. And here I would ask you what has

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been the most important discovery made by the free spirit of inquiry and experiment.

It is, I venture to affirm, the discovery of the way in which exchange ministers to the economic requirements of mankind. Exchange is the pivot, the well-lubricated pivot, on which industrial society revolves. The lubricating oil—if the metaphor may be allowed—is the profit which each transaction promises to those who take part in it; and if there is one point about which Socialists are agreed, it is that individual profit is a thing which they will not countenance. Exchange, therefore, and the society based on it, is the very antithesis of Socialism.

We find it difficult to realize now that there was in human history a pre-economic era when exchange was not practised, or practised only in a most rudimentary form. There are, however, even at the present day tribes where the conception of trade is altogether unknown; and if we refer to such a book as Bucher's 'Industrial Evolution,' or, indeed, any work on the history of primitive institutions, we can see how the first beginnings of exchange are mixed up with the ceremonial of gifts, how exchange came later to be conducted in neutral and, in a sense, religious enclosures, in markets set up on the boundaries of neighbouring tribes, and presided over by tutelary gods, to whom sacrifice had to be made. We might note also that strange phenomenon of the so-called 'silent trade,' in which the exchangers do not meet, but, as I understand, silently and secretly deposit their wares under the protection of some fetish.

Now, if we want to appreciate how much liberty has done for mankind by this expedient of exchange, we must try to realize the enormous obstruction to civilization which such early custom imposed.

And in considering the removal of these impedi-

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ments to economic progress, we should be wrong to confine our thoughts entirely to the material aspects of the subject. It may to some seem humiliating to perceive how closely morality and the higher efforts of our social intelligence follow on our exercise of activities undertaken in the pursuit of purely material objects ; but if we accept the evolutionary theory of ethics, the truth of the proposition must be admitted. The general presumption at which civilized mankind has arrived in favour of intensive industry and exchange as preferable to the nomad life and the satisfaction of our wants by pillage is due to our appreciation that this is the line of action approved by the law of economy of effort. A man or a society is civilized when the general rule claims his obedience, and overrides his ever-latent instinct to revert to primitive methods, now recognized to be immoral and uncivilized. The point which I wish to emphasize is, that every step forward is the result of free inquiry, free experiment, personal initiative ; and that not only our material progress, but our intellectual and moral progress, has in the past been developed by our experience gathered in combating these early disabilities.

It is not possible now to set out in any detail the history of the expansion of exchange and commerce, nor to note how it has been followed by a morality appropriate to it. The morality of commerce, I shall be reminded, is very defective, and leaves much to be desired. I submit, however, that in passing criticism on some dishonest action we are apt to forget the 999 instances out of 1,000 in which contracts are punctually and honestly performed. Further, I would hazard the speculation that the imperfections of commercial morality are largely due to the fact that for the punctual performance of commercial contract there has been a

disposition to rely on the authority and compulsion of the law, rather than on the allegiance which men do not refuse to the more exacting but non-legal behests of honour, and on a right appreciation of the course of conduct required in a society where liberty is accepted as an ideal. I will not now follow this line of argument further, but will pass on to direct attention to one point which I think will bring into contrast the antithesis between exchange and Socialism.

If, as I understand undoubtedly is the case, the early history of commerce is much involved in the earlier ceremonial of gifts—a ceremonial involving difficulties to exchange, which by no means consisted in the generous competition of donors, but in a most tedious system of jealous pretension and most inconvenient etiquette ; if, as is also tolerably clear, one of the steps taken to obviate these difficulties was the invention of currency or money ; if, as I argue, this is a contribution to progress which, for the facilitating of free exchanges, liberty of experiment has given us, it is surely something more than a mere coincidence that in his exposition of Scientific Socialism Karl Marx, the apostle of Socialism, should have put in the forefront of his reconstruction of society a demand for the abolition of money, and for the substitution of a social-labour-note-currency.

Now, a social-labour-note-currency is essentially a return to something analogous to the ceremonial of gifts, and it would seem that, in the pursuit of Socialism, we are invited literally to retrace, step by step, the road along which the course of civilization has hitherto led us. Travellers have told us of the tedious process of effecting an exchange with some dusky potentate whose pretensions have to be satisfied by means of gifts ; but I submit that such difficulties would be infinitesimal compared with

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those to be encountered by any public authority which undertook to assess the 'social value' of the labour of each member of the community without the aid of that automatic system of valuation provided for us by money and freedom of exchange.

We are not now concerned, however, with the practicability or otherwise of schemes which the Socialists wish to substitute for the principles on which social life is at present getting itself organized ; our object is rather to consider why they reject the organizing power of liberty, and in particular of that phase of liberty which we call exchange. In passing, I may remark that exchange is essentially free—forced exchange is taxation or mere spoliation —so that when I speak of exchange, I mean free exchange. Let us examine, therefore, somewhat more closely the nature of the prejudice which has been raised.

Basing his argument on some unfortunate remarks made by Ricardo and other so-called orthodox economists who thought the rate of wages must always oscillate about the point which represented a bare maintenance for the labourer—the so-called iron law of wages—Karl Marx invented his famous doctrine of surplus value, which suggests that in every exchange in which labour forms a part labour is defrauded. On this he founded a prophecy, which, if his premises were sound, had been logical enough—namely, that a civilization based on such a system was bound to collapse, and that the condition of a class which was perpetually being defrauded must inevitably deteriorate.

The theoretical unsoundness of Marx's position with regard to exchange is best exposed by allowing our minds to dwell on the axiomatic consideration that in every exchange in the estimation of the exchangers—who, after all, are the persons best in

a position to know—*both parties* gain, for unless this was the estimate of the exchangers, no exchange would take place.

It may be that under stress of circumstances a man exchanges something for which, under more favourable auspices, he might have got a better exchange; but this is no indictment of the equity of exchange, though it may be of the equity of the circumstances which produce a ‘stress.’ The question then arises, Is the stress of circumstances in the case of the labourer so permanent, so depressing, that an equitable expedient such as exchange has been useless to him?

In answer to this we must leave the realm of theory, and content ourselves with pointing out that Marx’s prophecy has been falsified by events. The wages and conditions of labour show a record of almost unbroken improvement throughout the time for which any trustworthy information is obtainable. So much so is this the case that even his own followers have to explain away his prophecy. Indeed, a great schism has arisen in the Socialist ranks, led by Edward Bernstein, a German Socialist, who, with expressions of great respect for the master, nevertheless repudiates Marx and his doctrines.

The position indeed is a remarkable one. The scientific basis of Socialism is shattered—not one stone remains upon another—but the movement runs on, detached from its so-called scientific basis, animated and driven by a sense of suffering which I would not venture to call ignoble, but which is absolutely useless for the constructive and reformative policy which the situation requires.

The indictment of Marx against economic liberty is in this respect practically abandoned even by his own followers. Far from being impossible, as Marx predicted, the advance of the poorer classes in com-

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fort and security has been considerable. The disappearance of forms of labour and contract which are inconsistent with the aspirations of civilization has gone on slowly but surely. The elimination of a scale of reward below what is now called 'the minimum wage,' has been, through natural economic causes, increasingly operative. The free movement of labour from the worse to the better conditions of employment at the call of the free market has secured this improvement without the aid of Socialistic legislation.

The improvement, of course, has been slow, and it is worth while to stop and consider calmly why it has been slow.

Let us enumerate some of the principal impediments through which liberty of exchange in respect of labour has had to break. Consider such a thing as feudalism and the long term of servitude to which labour was committed under its influence, the monopoly claimed by the medieval guilds. Remember, too, how in England, when the restrictions arising out of these primitive forms of Socialism were disappearing, the Poor Law legislation of Elizabeth practically re-enacted the adscription of the labourer to the soil, and prepared the way for that disastrous law of settlement which, by its insidious benevolence, bound the English poor to more than two centuries of immobility and depression.

Consider, too, the whole attitude of the modern world to the question of the remuneration of labour.

We have not even yet, I venture to affirm, realized how entirely the fortune of labour depends on its mobility, on its adaptability to the changing requirements of industry, and generally on the effectual removal of those initial frictions which prevent the steady flow of labour from the lower to the higher markets of remuneration.

The claim that is sometimes put forward by

trade-unions for a monopoly of particular industries is a natural instinct which has as yet been little broken down by the more rational view that their demand involves an infringement of the liberty of all other workmen, a great barrier to the mobility of labour, and that therefore it is impolitic in the highest interest of labour generally.

It is not sufficiently realized that the expansion of English trade depends on the expansion of the home market much more than on the expansion of our foreign market ; and the expansion of our home market depends on the increased purchasing power of our working classes, which, again, depends on the effectual transformation of the unskilled into the skilled class. This movement, for which there is an ample security in an atmosphere of liberty, causes a constant and steady expansion of industry, and guarantees the permanence of this ascent of labour. That this improvement is going on I have not the least doubt, notwithstanding all the impediments which are thrown in its way.

If men's characters were so disciplined that they were ready to subordinate their instincts to their reason and to understand that the law of liberty, even when it appears to be less advantageous than a policy of coercion, has its compensations, we could confidently expect that progress was about to become more rapid. We welcome, therefore, the controversy that is narrowing the issues, for this is a necessary preliminary to a wiser attitude. There may now be some chance of arriving at that most practical thing in the world—*a right theory* ; some chance of investing the principle of liberty with the authority to which a calm consideration of history shows that it is entitled.

It has not been possible altogether to keep apart the discussion of the past and the present, but very briefly I must say something of the present.

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Consider such a fact as the victualling of a town like London. Follow the long series of exchanges all over the world which combine to bring us each morning our daily bread. Every single act in this vast series, which is spread out all over the globe, which extends back into the past and looks forward also into the future, is, and has been rendered, possible by the profit which accrues to both parties in each single one of these transactions. Now, what an enormous task lies before anyone who proposes to supersede this simple, economical, and automatic system by one in which the expectation of profit is no longer to be the organizing principle! At present the only part played by the State is that it guarantees the protection of liberty and property, a function which it is seldom called on to exercise, and which, relatively to the vast field of activity set in motion by the action of private initiative, is comparatively trifling; so much so that we are quite satisfied that if the authority of the State were withdrawn the interest of the commercial community would be sufficient to maintain the simple fundamental postulates of civilized society—namely, security of person and property.

On the other hand, take away the organizing influence which is everywhere diffused throughout industry by the adjustment of supply and demand by means of exchange, and chaos supervenes. It might be possible with the power of the purse and the power of the stick (this last admittedly a very essential feature in the situation) to manufacture commodities. This was done in the slave States of the ancient and modern world, and might be done by the Socialist State; but to manufacture them in the right quantities, at the right places, and of the right quality, and by a rapid succession of improved methods, is quite another thing. We may be reminded that many corporations supply gas and

water, and that a few, greatly daring, have undertaken to supply milk to a limited number of their citizens ; but this is a very slight argument for proposing a revolutionary change in the whole principle which animates the pulse of industry ; and besides, what little they do accomplish is accomplished by the aid of the condemned principle of profit, and by the assistance of currency.

Frankly, I must admit my imagination is not equal to the task of picturing how such a thing as the victualling of London could get itself carried out under Socialism. If we prohibit exchanging for profit, we must substitute some other motive of action. The Socialist suggests, as I understand it, manufacturing committees of the public authorities, endless inspectors, and at the back of all, the power of the lash to drive people who may be discontented with the place in life assigned to them (there are such unreasonable people) to occupations as to which they can be allowed no power of choice.

We recently had experience of sending some quarter of a million men into the field in South Africa, and without the assistance of exchange, we had to feed them. As was subsequently brought out, the task proved almost unmanageable ; even when the numbers and area were so comparatively small, the grossest waste and malversation arose ; instead of getting the right quantities to the right place, at one point supplies were short, and at another vast surpluses accumulated, and either rotted away or were sold off at a ruinous sacrifice.

Even in time of peace our Indian Civil Service, the most highly-trained and most disinterested public servants that the world has ever seen, find it impossible to deal with a famine with the economy and precision which characterize the distribution of food by the normal economic expedient of exchange. Here they have to deal with a docile

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population, which lives mainly on one single form of food—rice. The record is not discreditable to our rule in India. Under their own rulers the population died like flies. Yet here even our best record is full of failure—inadequate preparation in one place and profusion and waste in another ; death from famine in one place, and in another dealers rushing up from the markets to buy the surplus stock of food which had been too zealously hurried up to the scene of the famine.

If trading for profit—a synonym for liberty of exchange—is abolished, as the Socialist proposes, some committee or body of committees will be set up to treat London, with all its various wants, in the same way as Indian officials have been called on to administer a famine-stricken Indian province. For ourselves, we can only say that we prefer the present system, with all its shortcomings, because in our judgment it is founded on right lines, and is capable of extension and improvement.

Leaving the more purely economic aspect of the question, let us turn to something more personal and private—namely, to the function assigned to the family and the home.

The economic argument which we have been pursuing may appear technical and uninteresting to those who are not versed in such controversy, but the status of the family, the relation of the husband and the wife, of the parents and their children, is a question which touches us all in the most intimate manner.

We cannot to-day traverse the whole question, but a word may be allowed on one very important part of it—namely, the status of women. The history of the past with regard to the status of women cannot be more accurately and briefly stated than in the coldly precise language of Herbert Spencer.

‘Perhaps in no way,’ says Mr. Spencer (*‘Sociology,’* vol. i., p. 712), ‘is the moral progress of mankind more clearly shown than by contrasting the position of women among savages with their position among the most advanced of the civilized—at the one extreme a treatment of them cruel to the utmost degree bearable, and at the other extreme a treatment which in some directions gives them precedence over men.’

In tracing the various steps by which the amelioration of the condition of women has been reached, the same author—in accordance with his general view of social evolution—shows how it is the growth of the industrial type which has brought the first signs of improvement. It is certainly remarkable in the instances which he adduces to notice that the separation of the employments of men and women, characteristic of the purely militant form of society, seems to have relegated all the drudgery of life to the weaker sex. It is when the co-operation of the industrial type begins that a more reasonable division of labour results. It is precisely the same class of considerations which have substituted exchange for pillage that, in the first instance, has brought about a more economical and more humane regulation of the family.

Co-operation and a definite division of responsibility are necessary for the preservation of human life, not only in its mature, but in its immature, stages ; and if history teaches us anything, it is that the universal experience of mankind has obliged it to accept the family as the institution which is best able to give protection to the immature period of human life.

The importance of the institution of the human family is not a topic on which I need enlarge. So essential has it been to the survival and welfare of

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the race that undoubtedly at times and in places it has been called on to bear more than it can sustain. Its authority has been often maintained long after the period of immaturity has ended. The patriarchal type of government is clearly a development of the usage of the natural family, and the patriarchal type involves a compulsory co-operation of a very arbitrary kind. Such accretions on the natural family type may have been temporarily advantageous, but as time goes on human experience finds them unnecessary and burdensome, and the effort to get rid of them is proportionately increased by the manner in which they are buttressed by custom, superstition, or legislation. Undoubtedly there has been some much-needed disintegration of the overgrowth of the principle of the family.

Here we come to a very clear issue with our Socialist opponents. They are of opinion, here as well as elsewhere, that the expedients, institutions, and other forms of co-operation adopted by the free experience of mankind are inadequate; that their complete disintegration is desirable; and that the community, acting through some regulative committee, can furnish us with better expedients. They assume that these will be in accordance with the highest aspiration of the most advanced portion of the civilized world, but we always have to remember that too often the regulative committee in real life proves to be something neither more honest nor more enlightened than some Poplar Board of Guardians.

Some members of the Socialist party have recently been protesting against the accusation that they are advocates of free-love. Such criticism, if it has been made, is very inept. The very opposite is the case. Those who value liberty are content with the use which mankind has made, and is

making, of its liberty in respect of marriage, as of all other things. Obviously the trend of opinion through the ages has been to give an ever higher ideal to the marriage tie, and though there may be points in the status of women, political and social, that are still unsettled, I think that we who have the advantage of belonging to a civilized community are not inclined to go back and put the relationship of man and wife under the tutelage of any one but of those most immediately concerned. In short, we believe in the equity, convenience, and morality of the system which the free initiative of mankind is ready to impose upon itself.

Ex hypothesi the Socialist is not content with this. Just as he thinks exchange involves a fraud, so in this all-important matter of the family he has argued himself into the belief that free institutions mean suicide and degeneration of the race, and for remedy here, as well as in matters more purely economic, he calls for the intervention of the State and wishes to put our marriage arrangements under the control and surveillance of some public authority.

Not long ago there appeared some letters in the *Times* under the title 'Race Suicide,' in which the writer, a leading member of the Socialist party, relying on some statistical gossip, gathered for the most part from among his own circle of friends, came to the conclusion that for various reasons the race was committing suicide, and that unless the County Council or some other authority intervened, we were in a very bad way. Accordingly, he proposed that mothers who produced children, under such conditions and of such quality as met with the approval of that august body, should be given prizes and have their children brought up at the public expense. The father presumably was disestablished and banished to Saturn, that limbo of useless and contemptible things.

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This, however, is only the beginning. These gentlemen are the victims of a remorseless logic, and when the first instalment of doctrine has been assimilated, the grammar of assent will no doubt be further unfolded. This has not yet reached the more public prints, and so we have to turn to the more esoteric Socialist publications to understand the development of the doctrine. If, as the writer in the *Times* seems to argue, the principle of the human family is to be assimilated to that of the stud farm, it is clear that this policy is very inadequately secured by offering prizes to female members of the herd who produce in some fortuitous manner satisfactory offspring.

The relentless logic of these gentlemen carries them much farther.

Mr. H. G. Wells, a writer favourably known to the public as the author of some pleasant Utopian romances, is, it seems, in Socialist circles quite a serious person. In a little book entitled 'Socialism and the Family' he develops the position in a very interesting manner. 'Socialism, indeed,' he says (p. 56), 'proposes to abolish altogether the patriarchal family, amidst whose disintegrating ruins we live, and to raise women to an equal citizenship with men. It proposes to give a man no more property in a woman than a woman has in a man. . . . It is quite compatible with a marriage contract of far greater stringency than that recognized throughout Christendom to-day.'

We have no quarrel with this language. Our difference here with Mr. Wells is that we distinguish between the patriarchal family as a political institution which disintegrating influences have attacked, to the great benefit of mankind, and the family as a natural social institution, the ordained protective influence which safeguards the immaturity of the race.

It is not a question of equality, but of the right and proper differentiation of the duties and responsibilities of the sexes.

Mr. Wells and his friends reject the social as well as the political family, and are obliged to invent some other controlling and protective force, and so he goes on to explain what that will be. ‘Now, what sort of contract,’ he asks, ‘will the Socialist State require for marriage?’ ‘Here, again,’ he goes on, ‘there are perfectly clear and simple principles. Socialism states definitely what almost everybody recognizes nowadays with greater or less clearness, and that is, the concern of the State for the children. . . . Socialism says boldly the State is the over parent, the outer parent. People rear children for the State and the future; if they do that well, they do the whole world a service and deserve payment, just as much as if they built a bridge or raised a crop of wheat. . . . The State will pay for children legitimately born in the marriage it will sanction. A woman with healthy and successful offspring will draw a wage for each one of them from the State, so long as they go on well. It will be her wage. Under the State she will control her child’s upbringing. How far her husband will share in the power of direction is a matter of detail, upon which opinion may vary, and does vary widely among Socialists. I suppose for the most part they incline to the conception of a joint control.’

‘To these conclusions,’ Mr. Wells tells us, ‘all but foolish, ignorant, base, or careless people are moving, albeit some are moving thither with averted faces.’

We do not wonder at the averted faces. It is the misfortune of those who start from false premises under the guidance of learned friends, driven by relentless logic, to find themselves on the brink of some

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distasteful and abhorred conclusion. The remedy is very simple and unheroic. We can only hope that a reconsideration of their premises may save them from a result which they instinctively view with well-founded aversion.

Lastly, with regard to the future. If we are at all right in our judgment that personal liberty has been the necessary condition of all progress in the past, and that at the present time the co-operative effort of all civilized societies is organized and kept in motion by exchange, and the profit which attends exchange, and that our social arrangements are kept sweet and wholesome by the respect which we have for personal liberty, we can have no reason for thinking that these influences will cease to be useful in the future. We can have no scruple, therefore, in resisting to the utmost of our power any further encroachments on our liberties; but the difficulty remains—How are we to get ourselves free from encroachments that have already been made, and from the restraint of obsolete survivals from which the virtue has departed?

Many of these encroachments have been made to meet some crying evil, and they often appear to be more or less successful, and it is extremely difficult to get people to see that the principle on which they are based is faulty, and that for this reason the solution which they offer is only an unsatisfactory substitute, which cannot be made the foundation of future progress.

We are not revolutionaries, and are well aware that reform can only come with a change of public sentiment.

The discussion is still in its theoretical, rather than its practical, stage. We have to admit that, though the majority of men regard with ‘averted faces’ the Socialist plan of life, and though we

believe this plan will prove itself to be impracticable, it is nevertheless true that the Socialist solution of using force in every difficulty which arises for solution is the expedient which commends itself to the practical politician and his supporters.

The programmes of our two great political parties give evidence, if evidence were needed, of the wide distance we are removed from any general acceptance of our views. The so-called Liberal party, by reason of certain developments within its own ranks, has found its policy modified by Socialistic influences. We have no special ground for complaint. The Socialist element now working in alliance with Liberalism is considerable, but Liberalism and Socialism are logically irreconcilable contraries, and sooner or later a severance must come; but in the meantime the attitude of the party is a menace to liberty. The position of the Conservative party relatively to what we believe to be the issue of the future—the struggle between Socialism and Liberty—is even more hopelessly confused. A large section of that party has most enthusiastically insisted on adopting a piece of Socialism, which, of all Socialisms, seems to me to be the most indefensible—the Socialism that seeks to protect the profits of the capitalist manufacturer at the expense of the rest of the population. The spectacle of a great party, proclaiming itself the opponent of the Socialism of the poor, and in the same breath urging a return to Protection, the Socialism of the rich, must serve to remind us how closely politics resembles a game of ‘blind-man’s buff,’ and how very little abstract justice and logic have to do with it.

The time, however, is coming—since the last General Election it seems to have come perceptibly nearer—when the controversy between Socialism

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and Liberty must be faced, and in the meantime all we can do is to arrange our arguments and await the reconstruction of parties, which already is long overdue. It may be that we must be worse before we are better. Obviously at present we are mainly on the defensive.

It is therefore of very little use setting out views which for the moment we know are premature. No prudent man will prophesy except under protest, more especially as our point seems to be fully established by a consideration of the past and the present. I will, however, throw aside prudence, and venture in one or two respects to indicate the policy which, under a happier state of public opinion, a belief in liberty might suggest.

A number of the largest industries in the country have to obtain Parliamentary powers for their inception and expansion—electric traction, electric power, railways, telephones, etc. The Socialist politician has inspired the Legislature with an insane jealousy of any private person or corporation making profit ; the consequence is that adventurers have been deterred from starting works, and to that extent a dearth of employment has resulted. If a juster view of the nature of profit obtained, and if the public authority encouraged rather than discouraged such enterprise, competition would consign the plant of antiquated services much more rapidly to the scrap-heap ; there would be a better demand for labour, and a better chance of absorbing such portion of the unemployed as is fit for employment.

Similarly, if people could realize that Free Trade, while it tends to reduce the price of commodities, has an opposite effect with regard to labour, we believe that an immense amount of jealousy and suspicion between employers and employed would be removed. The open market is an equitable

institution, in which, as already hinted, labour has everything to gain, and it is to the interests of labour that the repulsion of a falling market should be allowed to exert its influence. It is quite as essential that the labourer should be diverted from an unremunerative market as that he should be attracted to a rising market.

At the present moment a great impulse has been given under Socialist influence to municipal trading, and generally to municipal expenditure of all kinds. As a result, municipal and State indebtedness has very largely increased. This is a great advantage to such of the capitalist class who are rich enough to invest their money at a low rate of interest with absolute security. This class of investor does nothing and takes no risk. The undertaking for which his money is borrowed may or may not earn a profit. In a large number of cases the money is not profitably used, and if the business in question had been a private venture, the capital would have been written down, and the shareholders would have lost all or a portion of their money; but as the money has been raised on the security of the rates and taxes, the public continues to be taxed for the use of the capital which is exhausted. I conceive that if we could dismiss from our minds the insane jealousy of private enterprise, our burden in the matter of rates and taxes would be materially lightened. Private enterprise is willing to take these risks for us, and we should allow it to have its way.

Again, are we satisfied with our education system? I conceive that our present plan of taking the management of this important social service away from the parents and the teachers is certainly very costly and wasteful. It deprives parents of a responsibility which they ought to

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discharge, and which, undischarged, involves a loss of social discipline which otherwise had been most valuable, and I question very much if it gives that liberty of experiment and variety which in every other department of life is essential to progress. If parents took the keen interest in their children's education which they ought to take, which the clergy say they take in the religious aspect of the question, a humanizing influence would be introduced into our social arrangements which at present is wanting, to our great detriment.

Again, as a Scotsman, I am aware of the great benefit which our Scottish system of banking has conferred on my country. The Scottish system of credit, based on the issue of £1 notes, was of the greatest material assistance to Scottish agriculture.

It has often been described how, in days when Scotland was very poor, a bank opened an office in some rural district, a box of banknotes was sent to a local agent from their central office, credits were opened for men whose sole capital was their integrity and industry, and from this union of credit and character the agriculture of Scotland was safely and gradually developed ; and, as I believe, not only financially, but also in the improved character of her people, Scotland reaped a great benefit from this successful application of the principle of exchange.

There are reasons too long to enter on now why commercial banking institutions are supposed not to be able to organize credit for the poorest classes, and a more elementary form of co-operation has been invented in the Raiffeisen and popular credit banks of Germany and Italy, and on a limited, but still very promising and successful, scale in Ireland by Sir Horace Plunkett. At the back of any system of credit there is need of a certain amount

of liquid capital, and one is tempted to ask, What assistance does this most important movement receive from the accumulated savings of the working class ? what amount of their earnings is directed to promoting credit institutions for their benefit, or to developing undertakings specially devoted to supplying their wants ?

The answer given would not be satisfactory. Government, for reasons which at one time were perhaps quite adequate, assumed that working people were unable to take care of their own savings, and organized the Post-Office Savings Bank, in many ways an excellent institution ; but it is to my mind questionable whether it has not obstructed the growth of more beneficial institutions. The Post-Office gathers the savings of the working class all over the country and carries them to London, and employs the fund so collected in financing the business of the State. The security is of course adequate, but not a penny of the millions that are in its custody is employed as capital for promoting industrial credit, or for developing housing schemes, or for any similar undertakings in the special interest of those to whom the capital belongs. This, I venture to say, is a sterile use of capital, inevitable so long as the State usurps the duty of capitalizing the savings of a section of the population. This is likely to continue till we can arouse public interest, and induce it to use the principle of liberty as a searchlight to examine and test every public institution from which its influence is excluded.

I might multiply such examples to any extent, but I have said enough to show that there are many points to which criticism in the light of a new principle ought to be directed. I will mention only one other, but I must premise that I advance

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it only paradoxically, and as a matter of speculative, rather than practical, interest.

It must always be a question how far Government is called on to recognize settlements and testamentary dispositions, or to enforce contracts, and to lend its machinery for the collection of debts.

Jurisprudence seems to have decided that it is necessary to set a limit on settlements, to curtail the power of the dead hand, to refuse to enforce the payment of gambling debts, and to institute bankruptcy laws for the relief of debtors.

Probably 999 out of every 1,000 contracts that are entered into in the ordinary course of business get themselves performed without any assistance from the State, and we are tempted to ask what would be the result of curtailing within much narrower limits the obligation of the State to enforce business contracts.

The one class of debts which the State does repudiate—gambling debts—are considered debts of honour, and are popularly given a certain precedence over debts which we all would recognize as having morally a superior claim.

The fact seems to suggest that the interference of the State has in this matter warped and wasted a valuable moral sentiment by withdrawing from it its legitimate object. If the whole burden of procuring the payment of debts had been left, or could now be gradually transferred to the moral sentiment, would business contracts be less punctually discharged? It is a question which opens the way to a very interesting argument. One sees in the suggestion a possibility of voiding contracts, or rather of preventing people entering on contracts, which morally are unsatisfactory and oppressive, though legally they may be regular enough. It may be also that such a policy would enormously

increase the value of character, and generally would have a moralizing influence on commercial and industrial life. I think it might plausibly be argued that the past history of jurisprudence shows some reasons for a belief that there is a tendency in this direction.

Let me repeat, however, I put this forward not quite seriously, but for the sake of promoting debate. I know there are persons who are not attracted to any theory of life unless it shows the possibility of sanctioning some revolutionary extravagance, and I feel I ought to say something to gratify them, most especially as I personally have much sympathy with their view. Anarchy plus the police constable has been put forward as an ideal, but even here we are at liberty to consider how far we can afford to curtail the authority of that constable, in the belief that the finer and more searching quality of the discipline imposed by liberty will be sufficient.

We who believe in liberty have naturally no desire to limit expectation as to possible extensions of our principle, and in this sense I would have you regard the speculative paradox which I have just advanced.

In conclusion, and by way of summing up the whole matter, I would again appeal to the maxim, *Quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*—a maxim which may be inconclusive as a test for questions of faith and opinion; but surely when we find some particular line of action universally adopted, coextensive with civilization, increasing ever in its resistless volume, transforming the face of the world and accompanying mankind in its progress from barbarism to civilization, bringing with it in its wake a code of social morality which compels our allegiance—when, I say, we find ourselves

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confronted with such a principle, I maintain it is one which we must accept, and which, if we are wise, we will accept enthusiastically, and look for its further promptings as the best guide for the future that lies before us.